

FIRST VISIT TO DREYFUS ON DEVIL'S ISLAND

Exactly How the Prisoner is Guarded, the Precise Regimen of His Daily Life and His Message--"I DO NOT"



(From Sketch by Dr. Berthault.)
Dreyfus's Bedroom In the Hut Inside the Stockade.

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FOR the first time a man who has seen and talked with Dreyfus, the prisoner of Devil's Island, reveals all that he knows.

This man is Dr. Leon Berthault, who writes for the Sunday Journal a profoundly interesting and often thrilling account of what he learned. Dr. Berthault is a French physician who, until recently, practised in Cayenne, the capital of French Guiana, off the coast of which is Devil's Island. He was temporarily employed as a physician in the convict settlement of the Ile Royale, which adjoins Devil's Island.

It was then that he saw and talked with Alfred Dreyfus, the ex-captain of artillery, whose condemnation to imprisonment for life on admittedly forged documents has raised an agitation that threatens to destroy the French Republic.

Dr. Berthault eloquently describes Dreyfus's horrible surroundings. He has not even the liberty of pestilent Devil's Island. He is chained to his bed at night. He is allowed for only a few hours during the day to go into a tiny enclosure formed by a palisade so high that he cannot see the ocean. He is allowed to speak to no one.

His health is bad, but his spirits are kept up by a belief in the ultimate success of the efforts to release him.

At one time it would have been easy to rescue him. To prove this M. Verignon, Director of the Penitentiary, landed secretly and reached Dreyfus's house without alarming the guard.

Now escape would be far more difficult, but according to Dr. Berthault there are many adventures in Cayenne who would make the attempt.

A tower with a Hotchkiss gun commands Devil's Island and the surrounding ocean. The guards have orders to kill Dreyfus first in case of an attempt at rescue.

Chronology of the Most Famous Prisoner of the Century.

1893. Captain Alfred Dreyfus, only Jewish officer appointed to the General Staff of the French army.

1894. Tried for selling military secrets to Germany, publicly degraded and banished to Devil's Island for life.

1896. Colonel Picquart declares that Major Esterhazy was author of bordereau used against Dreyfus at his trial. Picquart is punished.

1897. M. Scheurer-Kestner, Vice-President of Senate, investigates case and declares Dreyfus innocent.

1898. Emile Zola affirms the illegality of Dreyfus's condemnation and is punished.

M. Gavaignac, Minister of War, declares his absolute belief in Dreyfus's guilt based on documents not produced at trial.

Colonel Henry commits suicide, virtually admitting charge that he forged documents referred to.

Brisson Cabinet orders a revision of the Dreyfus case.

General Zurlinden orders the arrest of Colonel Picquart in order to condemn him before the highest civil court in France can reopen the Dreyfus case.



HAVE seen and spoken to Dreyfus, the prisoner of Devil's Island, the most famous prisoner in the world.

In my capacity as a physician I was privileged to see him. Believing in his innocence, and feeling a great sympathy for him, I took care to encourage him and to obtain from him a message for the world.

I have been a practising physician in Cayenne, the unspeakable capital of the unspeakable French colony of Guiana.

In July last there was an outbreak of yellow fever among the convicts of the Ile Royale. Two of the prison doctors were stricken down, and I was called in, with others from Cayenne, to save the situation.

At that time, you will remember, there was an outcry in France that Dreyfus was dangerously ill and that he was being done to death by the severity of his keepers. The Minister of the Colonies ordered M. Verignon, the director of the penitentiary, to have a medical report prepared of Dreyfus's condition.

One of the regular prison doctors was assigned to make this report, but I managed to accompany him. I may say here that the doctors were the only persons at the penitentiary who cared whether Dreyfus lived or died.

The Iles du Salut are three in number. Of these the northernmost is the Ile du Diable (Devil's Island), the prison of Dreyfus. The largest island in the centre of this group is called the Ile Royale and contains the convict settlement. On the southern island—the Ile St. Joseph—there are only some storehouses.

Seen on a fine day, the islands are gems in the ocean. They are crowned by beautifully green coconut trees. In reality, they are full of fever, alternately scorched by the sun and drenched by the rain, swarming with snakes, mosquitoes and noxious insects.

From the Ile Royale one can almost hear a person speak on Devil's Island, and can easily distinguish signs made by him.

In the first place, I will relate my personal experience with Dreyfus. On our first visit we were accompanied by M. Verignon, the director of the penitentiary. We found the prisoner suffering from an affection of the liver, anaemia and other conditions, due to nervous depression and improper nourishment.

At the time he was also suffering from an inept attack of bilious fever, which might become grave if not attended to.

I felt the prisoner's pulse, and at the same time managed to whisper to him that I would take a message from him if I could. At this moment my medical friend was occupying M. Verignon in somewhat animated conversation.

Dreyfus was confined to his bed five days, and required constant medical attention. My friend was greatly occupied by the sick convicts, who were dying like poisoned rats.

I was therefore assigned to attend Dreyfus.

At all times I was watched both by Dreyfus's guards and an official specially detailed by the director of the penitentiary. Nevertheless, my prolonged visits wearied the guards somewhat, and they unintentionally permitted

me to hold communication with the prisoner.

"Do not be discouraged," I said. "Truth and justice are on your side, and they will save you in the end. Your friends are invincible. They do not know when they are beaten. Once your case seemed hopeless. Now the prospects are bright."

Dreyfus said to me at various times:

"I do not give up hope. That is the only thing which keeps me alive. But the ordeal almost kills me. The disgrace, the climate, the horrible solitude, the brutal regime here, are enough to kill a man with brighter prospects than mine."

"Tell my friends that I will keep alive, if I can, out of gratitude for their work."

I had, of course, an opportunity to gain a perfect knowledge of the surroundings of Dreyfus.

Three buildings in all are occupied by Dreyfus and his guards. They are situated near the southern end of the island on a little plateau 60 feet long by 150 feet high.

The object which at once strikes the eye is a wooden tower, some thirty feet high, with a platform at the top. Here is mounted a Hotchkiss machine gun. It sweeps the island and the surrounding ocean, and is capable of destroying any craft less than a war ship.

The tower backs against the house of the guards, a wooden building twenty-five feet square, with a veranda.

One only sees the roof of Dreyfus's hut, which is enclosed in a high wooden palisade. The hut is of sheet iron, so that the prisoner may not cut holes in it.

The space within the palisade is thirty-six by eighteen feet in extent. The fence is composed of great wooden posts, seven feet high, with square sides, fitted so closely together that a mouse could not crawl between. At its southern extremity it has been necessary to support the palisade with masonry.

At the extreme southern point of the island are the buildings which Dreyfus and his guards occupied two years ago.

He is now treated with greater severity than at that time. He could then wander about his island and look at the people on the Ile Royale. Once he received signals from a man on the island who wished to aid his escape. Now he cannot see the ocean. He is a prisoner in the palisade.

Devil's Island can be reached without attracting the attention of the guards. M. Verignon, the director, proved this by doing it himself.

Dreyfus could be rescued, if he would consent. There are dozens of ex-convicts and queer water-side characters in Cayenne who make it a business of helping convicts to escape. They often succeed. For the money that Dreyfus's friends could pay they would make an unusually desperate attempt. One of them said to me:

"For a million francs I would stake my life that I would rescue him."

M. Verignon is well aware of the possibility of escape for some of his convicts. He endeavored to make it an impossibility for Dreyfus.

To test the efficacy of his measures, he determined to attempt a secret landing on Devil's Island himself. He freely risked his life.

Alone, he took a light sailing boat from the Ile Royale, sailed around the Ile St. Joseph, and approached Devil's Island from the north, the point farthest removed from the watch tower. On a night of Egyptian darkness, over a sea swarming with sharks, he threaded his way through a net work of reefs and ran into a little creek.

Creeping around the shore of the island disturbing snakes and alligators, he finally opened the light of the guard house. Slowly he crept up, exposing himself to death in the open ground.

No one observed him. He looked into Dreyfus's hut and saw his guard sleeping. An attempt to rescue, backed by half a dozen desperate men, would surely have succeeded.

Then M. Verignon opened the door of the guard house, and said, before they had time to shoot him:

"I am M. Verignon, director of the penitentiary."

The guards were changed. M. Verignon tried the same experiment again, and again he succeeded. He will do any this, but I have positive knowledge of its truth.

M. Verignon made a report of these events to M. Andre Lebon, the Minister of the Colonies. He was a furious persecutor of Dreyfus. He determined to secure the prisoner, even if it were necessary to chain him hand and foot.

With this object in view, he selected a special agent—an offensively zealous and self-important public functionary. This was M. Deniel, who held the rank of commandant de penitencier—a minor position.

This person used to march proudly through Cayenne society, exclaiming:

"I bear a secret of state. . . . My mission is of high national importance."

He proceeded to regulate the treatment of Dreyfus according to his own ideas.

M. Deniel caused Dreyfus to be chained to his bed every night. A heavy plank bed was placed in the prisoner's hut. At the foot of the bed an iron rod was fixed. To this Dreyfus's ankles were fastened every night by means of chains. It is the method adopted with the most dangerous and refractory criminals in the Ile Royale. The pain and the humiliation almost killed Dreyfus.

The Governor of the colony protested that it was unjustifiable. The prisoner's friends, who hear everything concerning his treatment, remonstrated. All was in vain.

Dreyfus was and still is treated with a severity not justified by his sentence. He was condemned to transportation for life and should have at least the same treatment as the ordinary criminals of the penal settlement. As a matter of fact he is condemned to cellular confinement.

He is not allowed beyond the narrow space enclosed by the high palisade. He is watched every moment of his life.

In his one living room is an iron cage in which a sentry sits perpetually and watches him. The object of the iron cage is that Dreyfus may not surprise the guard in a moment of carelessness or sleepiness and overpower him.

I took the opportunity to examine this cage. The bars are far enough apart to allow the man inside to shoot through them. Inside is a button connecting with an electric bell by means of which the sentry can alarm his companions in the guard house. The most curious feature of



(FROM A SKETCH FOR THE SUNDAY
Dreyfus Imprisoned in a Hut with a French Soldier on Guard

PHOTOGRAPH OF

CAPT. ALFRED

DREYFUS,

TAKEN

BY

THE

FRENCH

POLICE

IMMEDI-

ATELY

AFTER HIS

DEGRADATION,



(FROM A PHOTOGRAPH)
Stockade in the Lonely West Indian Devil's Island, Where France's Famous Prisoner Is Confined.



(FROM A SKETCH)
The Prisoner Taking His